



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Higher Education
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by

Vassilis L. Syrmos, Vice President for Research and Innovation
University of Hawai'i System

HB 847 – RELATING TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII RESEARCH

Chair Woodson, Vice Chair Hashem and members of the committee:

The University of Hawai'i (UH) supports this bill which would provide UH express statutory authority to encourage, promote, financially support and directly participate in the commercialization of UH-generated research. The legal framework is adapted from chapter 211F, Hawai'i Revised Statutes, applicable to the Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism (DBEDT).

With its array of program strengths in ocean sciences, energy research, sustainable agriculture and astronomy; and its growing strength in cybersecurity and health sciences -- UH is the primary public institution generating academic research in the state.

A portion of the academic research has the potential to be converted to commercially viable products. In the past, UH secured patents on its inventions and licensed the patents to private companies willing to risk commercialization. After observing how UH's mainland public university counterparts promote innovation and research, it is clear that University of Hawai'i needs to be more active in its support and more focused in its efforts to commercialize its research products – which in turn will contribute to a dynamic and more diverse workforce in the state and promote economic health.

The University of Hawai'i established a proof of concept center/venture accelerator program named "XLR8UH" to turn university-related research into viable commercial products in cooperation with private investment. If a clear legal framework authorizing UH to participate directly and indirectly in new enterprises were established, UH could more efficiently contribute to the Hawai'i Innovation Initiative's effort to help diversify the state's economy. This express legal authority would reduce the uncertainty in creating, financing, and operating new ventures affiliated with UH, and would thereby induce greater private sector participation in promising concepts.

The University of Hawai'i's brand will also be enhanced. Currently, UH lags its peer institutions in having the support infrastructure to encourage and nurture technology transfer. To keep UH competitive with its mainland peers in the competition for external commercial research sponsorship and in the completion for hiring entrepreneurial faculty or staff, it needs to develop a commercialization capacity.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify on this measure.